

Walking in the Light

By Miriam Maxcy

*Happiness is the walk
Walk for yourself
and you walk for everyone.*

– Thich Nhat Hanh

I WALKED INTO MY HUMBLE KITCHEN YESTERDAY. The windows were open and the sun was shining directly on my Lao mother, Meh. She was sitting on a short stool over a rattan table chopping vegetables into a massive bowl. I quickly sat down to help her. Meh spent most of the rest of the day in the kitchen infusing our feast with her generous love. While Meh was in the kitchen Pa was scurrying about the house, cleaning, sweeping and rearranging furniture, always with a smile on his face. My Lao sister, Pao, was on a secret mission she wouldn't tell me about, and my brothers, N and Neh were assisting where they were needed. When all the preparations were done, the house looked immaculate and we sat and enjoyed it as we awaited the guests who trickled in throughout the evening.

We ate and sang Lao songs, laughed and loved one another. The celebration of which there was so much love and care put into was for my birthday. I am thankful that there were friends present to witness the love that flowed through the house, that always does. I am constantly trying to convey to those around me how exceptionally and generously loving my Lao family is, but words do not carry the grace

in which they walk this earth.

My Lao family is among the number of teachers I am blessed to have in my life always but especially this year. As I reflect on the past months, the lesson that becomes so clear to me is the lesson of the transformative power of love. I have been taught this lesson all of my life through my own survival of poverty and violence; the survival was birthed in the love that was constantly fed to me through the hands of others, which I believe, were also the hands of God.

Upon arrival in Laos I was met with challenges that caught me completely off-guard. Those challenges were not rooted in Lao culture but within Christian culture. Those initial challenges were suffocating and at one point I didn't think I would find a place of community, where I would fit or where others would allow me to fit. Gradually, though, as I settled into Lao culture, with my Lao family, and in my workplaces, and began dialoguing internally and externally, I was able to breathe and breath deeply. More than that though, I was able to love more freely, despite the theological differences; this, in turn, gave

me the fuel to do my work from a place of love. There is something very absent in my life if I cannot come from a place of love in my witness and work. Through the love I receive daily I am able to love, and the work becomes so much more powerful in that essence.

I have witnessed the transformative power of love many times. Just last week I was participating in a story-telling workshop and some energetic boys were causing a ruckus. Someone went over to silence them very sternly and they continued to disrupt the workshop. Moments later, two women walked up to them, started joking with them, appreciating their playfulness but gently and lovingly asked them to be respectful and pay attention.

**I leave you with the image
the children hold of peace,
which I am certain comes from
a place of love, of being loved:
women harvesting, nurturing
and balancing the world
on their slight shoulders.**

The boys quickly settled down. This is a simple situation I am sure we all have experienced in our lives: rowdy kids and the immediate impulse to silence them. Yet that rowdiness, that rebel energy holds

(continued on page 26)

(WALKING IN THE LIGHT, *continued from page 9*)
so much power and creativity if we could only harness it. They are starving to be loved and empowered, and their energy is just waiting to be channeled and transformed into leadership.

I am reminded of a class I taught a couple of months ago. I was approached by one of my bosses and was introduced to a woman who is working for the Nobel Peace Prize Committee. She is traversing Asia in search of eight women who are working for peace. This inspired an English class with “Women Peacemakers” as the theme. I facilitated a discussion in my grade five, four and three classes about peace — asking questions about what peace is, what it means to be peaceful, what does it mean to work for peace? We then did a little meditation and yoga. At this point I asked the students to work in silence and draw a picture of a woman in their lives who they think works for peace. This was the most quietly I have ever seen these children work. Out of the silence came beautiful, colourful images of woman working for peace.

For these Lao children who live in the very pit of economic poverty their sense of peace was beyond moving. The images were mostly of their mothers, grandmothers and sometimes of their teachers doing the work they do every day: harvesting rice, cooking over a fire, balancing heavy loads on their shoulders.

As I write images keep flooding my mind; there are so many more stories to tell, birthed in this land that many judge as poor.

Living here I have been questioning my understanding of *poverty* and *development*. These judging words hold so much power over countries like Laos; in this, they are unjust words, judging words. I do not know what is best for Laos; Lao people know what is best for Laos, and it is for them to determine. So I leave you with the image the children hold of peace, which I am certain comes from a place of love, of being loved: women harvesting, nurturing and balancing the world on their slight shoulders. ☞

Miriam Maxcy is a Young Adult Friend of Vancouver Monthly Meeting.



Canadian Yearly Meeting National Listeners



(PLEASE NOTE UPDATED CONTACT INFORMATION.)

Canadian Yearly Meeting National Listeners, guided by Continuing Meeting of Ministry and Counsel, are available to listen to any Canadian Friend disclose harm done on matters of sexual harassment or abuse, or any other topic a Friend may need to discuss.

If you need a listener, the first step is to approach a trusted Friend within your Monthly Meeting (MM), or to go to your MM Ministry and Counsel. If this path is not comfortable, you may approach a National Listener. Listeners seek to be present from a place of spirit-centred openness – to hold the caller and the situation in the Light, and to listen with tenderness. Though we are not therapists, we do know the healing that comes from simply being heard. We offer you a safe and confidential space in which to speak. One call might be all you need. If not, we have the task of discerning with you what a next step could be: whether a committee of care, of clearness, or of oversight might be appropriate; or how to find other possible resources.

All four National Listeners have experience in listening to issues around sexual abuse, as well as other concerns. Here is who we are and how to contact us:

- Alan Patola-Moosmann – Telephone: (604) 736-8596 (Alan has no e-mail at this time.)
- Dorothy Janes – Telephone: (416) 929-8812; E-mail: dorothyj@idirect.com
- Jay Cowsill – Telephone (306) 652-2407; E-mail: jmc590@mail.usask.ca
- Rose Marie Cipryk – Telephone: (905) 684-9924; E-mail: rmcipryk@cogeco.ca

Whenever possible, please contact us first to arrange a mutually convenient time to speak later.